FREEDOM ONLINE COALITION: Factsheet

The Freedom Online Coalition (FOC) is an intergovernmental coalition that was established at the inaugural Freedom Online Conference in The Hague, the Netherlands, 8-9 December 2011. As indicated in its founding declaration, the FOC is committed to advancing Internet freedom – free expression, association, assembly, and privacy online – worldwide. FOC member states are committed to work together diplomatically to voice concern over measures to restrict Internet freedom and support those individuals whose human rights online are curtailed. Since 2011, the Coalition has grown from 15 initial Members to 30 today[1].

On 16 May 2017, at the FOC Strategy and Coordination Meeting held adjacent to the Stockholm Internet Forum 2017, the FOC officially adopted its new Terms of Reference (TOR). The new TOR - known as the 'Stockholm Terms of Reference' - contains, *inter alia*, updates to the Coalition's Membership criteria, the future of multistakeholder engagement in the Coalition, and provides clarification of FOC's working methods. The revision of the TOR represents a key outcome of the FOC Strategic Review which culminated at the 6th Annual Freedom Online Conference in Costa Rica in October 2016 with the adoption of the San José Statement.

Since its inception, Members of the Coalition have gathered informally as governments and in consultation with other stakeholders at numerous conferences and intergovernmental meetings relevant to Internet freedom as well as in specific countries, to coordinate viewpoints, share relevant information, and discuss strategies to advance an open Internet in each context. FOC Diplomatic Networks facilitate coordination of representatives in Paris, Geneva, New York and Vienna. FOC meetings have taken place in forums ranging from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), to the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Internet Governance Forum, and the Stockholm Internet Forum.

Notable examples of joint coordination include submission of coordinated FOC input into UNESCO's Internet Study (March 2015), the Joint Statement presented at the Human Rights Council (June 2015) and Joint Statements on restrictive data localization laws (September 2015), cross-border attacks on freedom of expression online (March 2016), Human Rights and the UN GGE (February 2017), Joint Statement and Accompanying Good Practices for Government on State-Sponsored Network Disruptions (March 2017) and the Joint Statement on Internet Censorship (2018). All statements are available online.

In addition to these activities, the FOC hosts an Annual Conference that aims to deepen the discussions on how freedom of expression on the Internet is helping to promote social, cultural and economic development. The Conference offers an open platform for discussion among all stakeholders – governments, civil society, the private sector, and others – to share relevant information, develop joint strategies and combine efforts towards their mutual goal of a human rights-based Internet. After the inaugural Conference in The Hague, subsequent annual Freedom Online Conferences were held in Kenya (September 2012), Tunisia (June 2013), Estonia (April 2014), Mongolia (May 2015), Costa Rica (October 2016), and most recently in Germany (November 2018). The Chair Summary of the FO Conference in Berlin can be found here.

Within the Stockholm Terms of Reference, the FOC identified as a priority the need to create a strong mechanism for ongoing multistakeholder engagement. Consequently, the FOC Advisory Network (FOC-AN) was established in 2018 to enhance the Coalition's multistakeholder engagement, including through providing advice on aims, objectives and activities of the Coalition, as well as to support its mission of advancing Internet freedom and human rights online. Since its establishment, FOC-AN Members have contributed widely to the FOC's activities and events, and regularly engage with the FOC through in-person Roundtable meetings, and Quarterly Calls with the Coalition.

At a time when Internet policy issues have become one of the most intensely discussed issues on the international agenda, the Coalition has a vital role to play in promoting the values of democracy and human rights online.

---

[1] Currently, the FOC consists of Argentina, Australia, Austria, Canada, Costa Rica, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Ireland, Japan, Kenya, Latvia, Lithuania, the Republic of Maldives, Mexico, Moldova, Mongolia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Tunisia, the United Kingdom and the United States.